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ABSTRACT

This publication offers guidelines that policymakers, advocates of children and older adults, and child care practitioners can use to provide older adults with opportunities to work in the child care field. Guidelines that address developmental issues relating to older adults concern employers' sensitivity to older adults and staffing patterns in child care programs that restore missing elements in children's lives. Guidelines that apply to preemployment activities concern recruitment, preemployment training, and the screening and hiring of older adults. Guidelines for training relate to provision of training appropriate to applicants' level of knowledge and skill, certification, training content, orientation, and in-service training. Guidelines that address working conditions concern: (1) compensation and benefits; (2) provision of a healthy, safe, and comfortable working environment; (3) ongoing supervision; and (4) clearly defined personnel policies. Guidelines that apply to career advancement relate to workers' opportunities to enter a career ladder, the assignment of meaningful tasks, and the employer's role in relation to workers. (BC)

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Guidelines for

THE PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT OF OLDER ADULTS IN CHILD CARE

Generations Together
University Center for Social and Urban Research
University of Pittsburgh
November, 1991

Project Staff

Sally M. Newman, Ph.D.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Developmental Issues 9

Pre-Employment Activities 11

Training and Education 15

Working Conditions 19

Career Advancement 23

Conclusion 27

References 29

WANTED: CHILD-CARE WORKERS, AGE 55 AND UP

Front page, *New York Times*
December 15, 1987

"Guidelines for the Productive Employment of Older Adults in Child Care" respond to the growing need to expand the pool of competent persons caring for our country's children.

RATIONALE

Evidence of the need for an increase in both the quantity and quality of child care services is compelling. For example, 60% of American families with children under age six report mothers in the workforce (Children's Defense Fund, 1990). Yet, many children are cared for by poorly prepared caregivers in developmentally inappropriate surroundings. Furthermore, a child care staffing crisis is developing because the number of persons 18-24, traditionally the primary labor pool for child care workers, is declining. This population decreased by approximately 5 million between 1980 and 1990.

Research has shown that good quality child care depends on well-oriented, trained, and supervised staff members, no matter what their age -- working under supportive and rewarding conditions that include adequate pay and benefits (National Child Care Staffing Study, 1989). Too often, however, child care agencies have emphasized finding sufficient "bodies" to fill job slots, rather than ensuring that their entire staff is appropriate, prepared, and skilled to do this specialized work, and that it is a balanced composition of people with different attributes.

There is growing evidence that child care providers can look to older adults as an increasingly viable source of potential staff members. For example, the 1980 census found that persons over age 55 accounted for 13% of all child care workers (*New York Times, 1987)*. Recognition of older adults' empathy, commitment, and interest in children, along with the fact that fewer young people are entering careers in child care, suggests the timeliness for older adults serving as child care workers. As the *New York Times* article states: "The hope is that retired people and those over age 55 may help meet a growing demand in a field with a chronic shortage of younger workers who are willing to work for its usually low wages."

Certainly older adult child care workers can contribute towards a solution to the staffing crisis. But to look upon them as an unpaid or poorly paid labor pool, provided with little or no preparation for the job, and confronted with insensitive working conditions, would diminish their great potential to improve the quality of care for children.

Older adults are looking for meaningful work that enables them to feel productive and optimally apply their talents gleaned over years of living. But neither the quality of child care, nor the well being of older adults, will improve

if older adults are simply hired without careful attention to recruitment, placement, training, supervision, and overall working conditions.

When their life issues, unique assets, and developmental characteristics are taken into consideration, older adults can make a significant contribution to child care, to children, to other staff members, and to parents. Children benefit by contact with older adults who can share the wisdom obtained from a lifetime of learning and experience, who can model successful aging, and who can form nurturing intergenerational relationships. Similarly, older adults can benefit physically, economically, emotionally, and cognitively from productive, meaningful work. Properly designed and structured child care work can increase older adults' self-esteem, energy level, competence, and overall sense of community participation.

THE PROJECT

Ensuring that older adults are provided such opportunities in child care is the function of the project "Guidelines for the Productive Employment of Older Adults in Child Care." Generations Together has, with funding from the Florence V. Burden Foundation, collaborated with aging and child care professionals, as well as specialists in labor, employment, and other relevant areas, to produce these guidelines which can help child care programs make optimal use of older adults to provide quality child care. In so doing, the guidelines respect the older adults' interests in productive work, appropriate preparation, suitable working conditions, and proper compensation.

The guidelines are applicable in a wide variety of programs, both full- and part-time, that serve children today: infant and family day care, center-based care, preschool,

Head Start, after school care, residential care, and programs for special needs and at-risk children.

The guidelines define older adults as persons 55 years or older or, in some cases where federal funding may be involved, as persons 60 or older.

Using a consensus building process, a working task force of experts from child care, child and adult development, gerontology, training, and employment policy developed and refined the guidelines. In addition, four child care centers in West Newton, MA; Syracuse, NY; Lancaster PA; and Washington, DC field tested the guidelines for one year.

The guidelines are organized in five categories, each containing specific recommendations: **Developmental Issues, Pre-employment Activities, Training and Education, Working Conditions, and Career Advancement.**

The project staff, working with the task force and field test sites, have also developed a practitioners' manual that details strategies and resources that help to implement the guidelines.

How were the guidelines developed?

The project staff:

- Identified and selected a large group of task force members and a smaller working group responsible for drafting the guidelines;

- Collected from the task force ranked lists of issues, which were then analyzed;

- Solicited preliminary concept and review papers from task force members on the most frequently mentioned issues;

- Convened a meeting of the working group in Washington, DC, to review issues and to discuss the guidelines' content;

- Prepared a first draft of the guidelines and circulated it to all task force members for their comments;

- Convened a working group meeting in Harrisburg, PA, to which were invited directors of the field test sites to plan field testing;

- Circulated a revised version of the draft guidelines to all task force members;

- Field tested the guidelines in the project sites at the Newton Community Service Center, West Newton, MA; Department of Labor Child Development Center, Washington, DC; the Lancaster County Head Start, Lancaster, PA; and the Syracuse Developmental Center Day Care Center, Syracuse, NY.

- Visited each of the four sites three times to discuss the guidelines' implementation, determine their effectiveness, and gather information for the practitioners' manual;

- Based on the field testing, prepared a revised set of guidelines for discussion at a final meeting of the working group and site directors;

- Circulated the final draft of the guidelines for endorsement by the task force.

Who can use the guidelines?

The guidelines can be used by:

- Policy makers in child care who are considering legislation for improving the quality of child care;
- Policy makers in aging who are considering legislation to expand opportunities for productive employment of older adults;
- Advocates in child care and aging concerned with improving the standards of care for young children;
- Advocates in child care and aging concerned with the quality of preparation and equity for the child care providers;
- Administrators, supervisors, directors, and other practitioners who are planning to or are already utilizing older adults as employees.

How can the guidelines be used?

- **Policy makers** can use the guidelines as the standards from which legislation can be created and as the basis for new legislation.
- **Advocates** can use the guidelines to convince policy makers that the issues addressed by these guidelines make a significant contribution to improving the quality of child care and the quality of child care providers.

- **Practitioners** can use the guidelines with the manual to aid them in effectively integrating older adult employees into the child care work place. The practitioners can use the guidelines at each stage of their program development as standards to guide their planning and action.

Benefits of the guidelines

The guidelines can ultimately ensure that the three major constituents -- policy makers, advocates, and practitioners -- work towards quality programs that exceed current minimum standards. Utilizing these guidelines will:

- Address the needs of older adults for meaningful and remunerative employment;
- Increase a sense of commitment and teamwork, and reduce staff turnover;
- Infuse new vitality into the workplace and generate new ideas for working together and with the children and families;
- Increase participants' pleasure and involvement in the programs;

- Enable the development of effective intergenerational programs that use older workers;
- Produce new knowledge about intergenerational programs.

Developmental issues pertain to the particular needs, concerns, goals, interests, and abilities relevant to a person's life stage. Sensitivity to these developmental issues will increase the likelihood that older adults will be productive and effective employees.

Guidelines

Employers should recognize, be sensitive to, and respond appropriately to older adults' issues related to productive employment in child care and early childhood education.

- Older adults who have already reared children, as well as those who have not, should be made aware of the importance of child care as a profession requiring specialized preparation.
- Child care work should be presented to older adults as a field in which previous life experience and current interests are a major asset when combined with formal knowledge and skill development.
- Although the majority of older adults entering the child care field are healthy and active, a limited number may have sensory deprivation, e.g., hearing loss or visual impairment. These impairments need to, and can, be addressed sensitively.
- Older adults, as well as others in child care, are engaged in life-long learning.
- Older adults are capable of learning well into advanced years.

- Older adults are capable of developing new careers; many are interested in doing so.

Effective child care programs provide staffing patterns that can restore elements that are missing in children's lives.

- Employment of older adults in child care centers provides children the opportunity to experience an intergenerational element that is missing in many of today's families and to see older adults as positive role models.

- Both older men and women should be encouraged to recognize the value of nurturing children and to pursue work in child care. Some older men may need to be encouraged to see the value of their contribution as caregivers to children; some older women may need to see themselves in a variety of leadership and administrative roles.

- Diversity among staff across socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, and age should be sought because it reflects the diversity of our pluralistic society and enriches the child care environment.

Preparation for employing older adults as child care workers often begins before qualified persons actually are offered and accept positions. Ensuring that a pool of older workers is available requires planned and proactive collaborative efforts.

Guidelines

Utilize active recruitment strategies.

- Recruitment should emphasize that child care is a professional field with various career development options.
- Recruitment approaches should be targeted to attract a balance of men and women; people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds; and individuals with various levels of education and experience.
- Recruitment efforts should stress the assets of child care work, i.e., the contribution to the community, flexible work schedules, an opportunity to make a difference to children and families, and the chance to be creative.
- Recruitment messages should show that the agency will offer adequate compensation, provide proper working conditions, and utilize older adults in significant ways.
- Child care and aging networks should collaborate on recruitment efforts.

- Registries of qualified and available older workers need to be developed.

- Older adults should be recruited for a variety of job roles such as resource persons, content specialists, and supervisors.

Pre-employment training for older adults.

- Job training might be provided through government agencies, service agencies, community schools and institutions, or higher education institutions.

- Training can serve as an initial screening device.

- Training should be sensitive to older adults' learning styles.

- Training should identify and integrate older adults' interests into the curriculum.

- Training should be conducted with younger workers participating and should introduce the concept of intergenerational teams.

- Optimal training involves hands-on practicum work, done under professional supervision.

Prepare existing staffs to work with older adults.

- Staff leadership should support efforts to integrate older adults into the work place.

- Staff of all ages and levels should receive training on adult development: stages, characteristics, and significant life issues.

- Staff at all levels -- trainers, supervisors, etc. -- need to recognize the commonalities that older adults share with all persons in the program as well as older adults' special attributes and needs.

- All staff should develop strategies for communicating effectively.

- All staff should recognize that different perspectives can be constructive, rather than negative, if appropriately handled.

- Staff should introduce parents to the concept of intergenerational teams of trained older and younger child care workers.

Carefully screen and systematically hire and place older adults.

- Aptitudes, interests, and related skills, along with previous experience, including formal and informal training, volunteer activities, and care giving, should be considered in selecting and placing older workers.

- Screening should assess attitudes toward children and personality attributes such as willingness to learn, to accept supervision, and to interact with the younger workers.

- Persons not selected in a screening process should be referred to other opportunities that may be more suitable for their skills, aptitudes, and interests.

- Older adults should meet eligibility requirements for health, criminal records checks, and other standards mandated by state and local regulations.

- Employers should consider older adults with previous experience in fields such as teaching, counseling, and social work for appropriate positions.

- Employers should explore carefully with the potential older adult employees their strengths relevant to child care work, as well as what meaning caregiving holds for them. This information can be utilized not only in assigning specific roles, but also in providing responsive, ongoing supervision.

Proper training of child care staff -- regardless of age -- is directly related to quality of service and turnover and retention rates. Having reared one's own children and having warm feelings for children, while important assets, simply are not sufficient qualifications to provide ongoing professional service to children. Hence, appropriate training and education of staff is essential.

Training refers to providing basic information and applied skills that are necessary to function effectively in a particular setting. The effectiveness of "makeshift" training, i.e., haphazard attendance at lectures or occasional workshops, is limited because such training often does not apply in actual settings, its information is not transferable, and it may not be sensitive to trainees' developmental characteristics.

Education refers to providing long-term theoretical and applied content that leads to a degree and placement in a formal professional career ladder. Child care agencies should make older adults aware of opportunities both for training and education, and provide the support they need to participate in it.

Guidelines

Promote training and education for older workers.

- Appropriate training and educational opportunities should be provided for older trainees based upon their developmental knowledge and skills.

- Interested and qualified older adults should be supported actively in attaining a recognized credential such as the Child Development Associate

Credential (CDA) or a degree from a recognized community college, college, or university.

- Where possible, in-service and other training programs should be linked to awarding of academic credits.

- Older adults bringing related educational credentials to their positions, or attaining degrees in appropriate fields (i.e., child development) subsequent to employment, should have this reflected in the level and responsibility of their job.

- Transferability of training, specific marketable skills, and credentials are as important to older adult workers as they are to younger workers.

Provide credible child care training and education for older adult workers.

- As much as possible, training should not only be competency-based, but also should encourage developmentally appropriate practice.

- Training for older workers should at minimum meet basic state guidelines.

- Training content should include knowledge and skill building in child development, developmentally appropriate practice, curriculum, activity media, classroom management, and health and safety. More specifically, it might focus on the Child Development Associates' 6 competencies and 13 functional areas.

- Content should be designed using appropriate curriculum and instructional planning models.

- Training needs to result in a certificate of competence in relationship to a job description and, when appropriate, be considered as pre-requisite for recognized credentials such as a CDA credential or degree in child care.

- Training can be individualized to meet specific agency requirements and can be a recognized formal education curriculum.

- Information on training and educational opportunities (degree programs) should be available to all staff, including older workers.

- Older adults already on staff might participate in delivering in-service training and orientation.

Provide careful and detailed orientation and continuing training for older workers once employed in a child care program.

- Orientation to a specific child care program needs to include center philosophy, policies, organization and reporting structure, working hours, holidays, and benefits; career options; health and safety procedures; client demographics; and roles and responsibilities of parents and staff.

- Orientation and in-service training should respect older learners' special characteristics and individual needs and differences.

Utilize older adult education principles in training older adults.

- Although it is appropriate to adapt training delivery to older workers' unique learning characteristics, the knowledge and skill requirements remain constant.

- Content should be relevant to the knowledge and skills of the trainees and should be presented using appropriate adult learning principles and methods for individualized instruction.

- Transportation and other arrangements should be provided when older workers are required to participate in training away from their sites.

- The learning environment should accommodate the comfort needs of older learners.

- Training should be properly sequenced and sufficiently frequent for learners to experience continuity from one session to another.

- Content and skills developed during in-service training should be reinforced directly by supervisors in relationship to practice at the work-place.

There is a close relationship in child care settings between positive working conditions, worker morale, and quality of direct service. Positive working conditions, including ongoing, supportive supervision by knowledgeable supervisors, are especially important for older adults and can make a major contribution towards enhancing productivity and reducing turnover. Favorable working conditions are compromised severely, however, if the most fundamental component--salary and wages--is not adequate.

Guidelines

Compensation and benefits must be equivalent for older adults and for other employees doing the same task, at the same job level.

- Employers should counter assertively the traditional public and political contention that older adults do not really want or need compensation equivalent to that of other workers.

- The composition of benefit packages should be worked out carefully with each older adult worker considering his or her individual situation within the limits of standard benefit packages offered to all employees.

Provide a multiplicity of positions in both direct and indirect service.

- Full-time, part-time, and flex-time options should be available.
- Positions should be tied to an agency career ladder.
- Older adults should be given the opportunity to work towards, or apply for, positions at levels other than the ones they hold.
- Older adults should be made aware of job openings and should know the procedures for applying for these positions.

Provide a healthy, safe, and comfortable environment for all older workers.

- Assignments to individual children and subgroups should consider the health and physical status of the children and the older adults.
- While characteristics and needs of older adults are to be taken into consideration, stereotypes about older adult physical limitations should be addressed with factual information.

- Environmental aids and arrangements that support the maximum use of older adult abilities should be provided, e.g., appropriate-sized chairs, breaks from work, building access, and a defined place for personal belongings.

Provide ongoing supervision of older adults.

- Older adults should be able to meet individually in a private space with a supervisor at a scheduled time.

- Group and peer supervision and coaching can be included in a total supervision model. Peer support groups of older adults may be especially valuable in developing effective intergenerational teams.

- "Mentoring" programs, pairing a new older adult worker with an experienced worker, may be considered as a supervisory method.

- Informal supervisory contacts should be available.

- Opportunities for career development and advancement should be a regular agenda item in supervisory contacts with older adults.

- Older adults' concerns about being supervised by younger persons and young persons' concerns about supervising olders need to be recognized and addressed.

- Supervisors should be aware of communication kills, issues, and perspectives generated by age differences, and older workers' strengths and potentials.

Maintain clearly defined personnel policies for older adults.

- Agency personnel policies, such as job descriptions, should apply to all workers, regardless of age.

- Procedure manuals should be developed to convey personnel policies with clarity.

Participatory management principles should be implemented as much as possible.

- Older adults should be viewed as full colleagues.

- Older adults should be integral members of planning and working teams.

As a field moving towards professionalization, child care requires that practitioners be able to develop from entry-level to more advanced work, and to be rewarded appropriately with compensation, recognition, and responsibility. Older adults, like workers of any age, need to have an opportunity to develop careers.

Guidelines

Provide older child care workers the opportunity to prepare for, and enter, a formal career ladder.

- This career ladder should include options for increased responsibility based on training, experience, skills, and professional growth on the job.
- The ladder should include "rungs" involving increased responsibility for both hands-on work and managerial tasks.
- There should be periodic reviews to consider increased compensation commensurate with responsibilities held.
- On-site career advancement workshops for older adults can be used to facilitate their personal career planning.

- Older adults bringing educational credentials to their positions or attaining degrees in appropriate fields (child development-related) subsequent to employment should have this reflected in the level and responsibility of their job.

- Where possible, in-service and other training programs should be linked to awarding of academic credits.

Tasks should be inherently meaningful and rewarding.

- Older adults should participate in preparation and maintenance work to the same degree that other staff in similar positions do.

- Older adults should be provided with the opportunity to discuss and receive feedback on their work.

- Opportunities for older adults to "specialize" should be sought, e.g., one-to-one interaction, story telling, art, special skill areas.

- Older adults should be encouraged to develop ongoing and consistent relationships with individual children in their care.

Employers' role in enhancing opportunities for older workers extends beyond the immediate setting.

- Agencies and employers should serve as advocates for the professionalization of child care as a field which is significantly linked to society's overall well-being and functioning.

- Employers should build coalitions with other agencies to develop advocacy activities at the state and federal levels. Such advocacy should include lobbying for better salaries, working conditions, and program support, not only for older adults, but for all who work in child care.

- Agencies should actively identify public and private organizations (i.e., corporations, individuals, foundations) that might serve as funding sources for employing and training older adults in child care.

- Child care programs employing older workers should invite legislators to observe their strengths and contributions.

- Organizations concerned with human welfare, e.g., agencies serving children and older adults, academic departments, and professional organizations, should plan and implement an ongoing dissemination and publication program on issues related to older adults as productive child care workers.

The successful inclusion of productively employed older adults in child care will depend on the degree to which employers are sensitive to the needs of their older and young workers and are willing to utilize resources such as these guidelines to support the creation of positive and supportive environs for all their workers. The possibility of providing enriching intergenerational experiences for young children and older adults is an exciting one for both the child care and the early childhood profession and the community of older persons seeking meaningful employment.

The guidelines are powerful in that they support several of the current major goals of the early childhood profession:

- *to insure a stable and well trained workforce;*
- *to build a viable career ladder where there is articulation between various levels of training; and*
- *to support equity and increase status for all workers."*

Carol B. Phillips, Executive Director, Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition

The guidelines are important and timely since they reflect and address converging needs related to quality day care for young families and meaningful and productive roles for older workers.

Catherine Ventura-Merkel, Senior Program Specialist, American Association of Retired Persons

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GENERATIONS TOGETHER

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The purpose of Generations Together is to create opportunities for intergenerational experiences that promote growth and understanding between the generations. To fulfill this purpose, Generations Together:

1. Develops innovative intergenerational programs as models for replication;

2. Conducts research on the effects of intergenerational programs on the participants and their communities;

3. Assists agencies and systems to develop their own intergenerational programs;

4. Publishes and disseminates information on the development and outcomes of intergenerational programs;

5. Facilitates a support network among agencies involved in intergenerational programs; and

6. Encourages public and social policies which foster intergenerational activity.

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